

# Where Does Career Support and Education in Japanese Universities Stand? Erosion by Business, or a New Form of University Education?

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The current university education landscape is very different from what it used to be, especially in terms of job placement support, career support, and career education. This article gives an overview of the expansion process of career support and education in universities according to three phases: (1) from job placement support to career support, (2) from career support to career education, and (3) the “universal phase” of career support and education, and traces the effects of higher education policies and the human resource and education business on this expansion process. Also, it makes clear that the expansion of career support and education was not carried out based on the independent initiative of universities, but rather the main factors were adaptation to environmental changes and universities’ dependence on services provided by the human resource and education business. How should we view the current situation? As one perspective, this article points out that one valid viewpoint is that of “erosion” of university education by the business sector, and that many problems are actually occurring in this regard. Meanwhile, another perspective presented is that although career support and education has developed unevenly and cannot be accepted in its current form, universities in the universal phase, which includes redefinition of university education, may be generating “prototypes” for building *a new form of university education*.

- I. The drastically changed landscape of university education
- II. The process of expansion of career support and education at universities
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## I. The drastically changed landscape of university education

The current landscape of university education, or somewhat more broadly speaking the lifestyles of students of which academics are a part, is filled with a deep, dark and heavy sense of anxiety, the source of which is *job hunting*. The typical interpersonal relationships and atmosphere surrounding students during the process of job hunting is like that compellingly depicted in Ryo Asai’s novel “*Nanimono*” [Somebody] (Asai 2012), but that is not all.

Compared to when this novel was published, over the last few years the labor market has clearly been a “seller’s market” for university students. Looking at the students around me, it seems that their sense of frustration and despair over job hunting have been alleviated to a great extent. Nevertheless, even today the

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mere prospect of job hunting is like a dark cloud hanging over students long before they actually start looking for jobs, and once the *actual* process begins it comes to dominate their lives and occupy enormous amounts of time and energy. Moreover, in light of the recent actions of *Keidanren* [the Japan Business Federation] with regard to “job hunting rules,” and the growing prevalence of internships which can be called “pre-job hunting activities,” the *actual* process of job hunting is starting earlier than ever and the overall period of job hunting is becoming longer.

To be sure, we see what is described as “*Zenshin Shūkatsu*” [total dedication to job hunting] (Ouchi and Takenobu 2014) cite this as one example of contemporary Japanese people dedicating themselves totally to the hunt for something, such as a job. This does not mean that a majority of students devote body, soul, and all of their time to job hunting. However, if one closely observes students who skillfully toggle back and forth between academics, part-time jobs, extracurricular activities, their own hobbies, and job hunting, they resemble people watching TV who may be fully engrossed in a program unrelated to job hunting, but as soon as a commercial comes on they switch over to the job-hunting channel. Even if they are not devoting body and soul to the search for employment all the time, they are always prepared to shift their focus to it whenever the need arises. Thus when the hunt begins in earnest, they do not hesitate to quit part-time jobs and extracurricular activities, and unashamedly, even somewhat audaciously skip academic obligations and seminars on the grounds that they have an internship, briefing for prospective students, or job interview to attend.

Faced with such students, quite a few university instructors lament “Aren’t academics a student’s main duty?” or “The university is not a preparatory school for employment,” or else quietly harbor a sense of shame. However, these instructors should be clearly aware of the situation. They may not personally be directly involved, but nowadays universities offer a wide range of “career support” (services that aid students in finding employment) as extracurricular activities, and even in the context of the official curriculum they are frantically seeking to provide educational opportunities, referred to as “career education,” that are not so different in essence from job-hunting support. Students are sensitively attuned to the university’s stance, and can pick up on *unspoken messages* about the actual mission of university education (“We want you to take academics seriously, but your employment outcome is an even more serious matter.”) In other words, the university education system itself is now starting to relegate the unwritten rule that “academics are a student’s main duty” to a mere stance lacking true substance (Komikawa 2018).

With that in mind, look around a university coolly and calmly, and you will see the career center has a revolving door for representatives of companies, through which frequently pass what appear to be members of the personnel departments of companies planning to hire students, or employees of human resources companies that the university has hired as instructors for seminars or classes offered as job-hunting support. Visit the teachers’ room, and you will often meet “new types of university instructors” (Komikawa 2017a) who were not found on university campuses in the past and do not always have academic backgrounds. These are adjunct instructors, including those dispatched from human resources companies and so forth, who are teaching “career education courses” at the university, or else limited-term, specially appointed teaching staff affiliated with the career center rather than being involved with teaching and learning in the university’s faculties and departments.

As we have seen, the current “landscape” of university education is something that we certainly did not see, and indeed would not have been possible, at Japanese universities 30 years ago. In short, university education itself is obviously leaning toward providing job placement support and in many cases fully “leaning in” to this role.

How did we get to this point? Without a doubt, there are diverse and complex factors involved, including a decrease in the 18-year-old population, trends in the market for new graduates, the universalization of university education, the higher education policies of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), students and their parents’ perceptions of higher education, and changing attitudes

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throughout society as a whole. However, we cannot afford to overlook the human resource and education business (and its influence) as actors (factors) that have brought about the “status of university education” over the past 15 years or so, in which universities have so drastically leaned in to the role of providing career support. The human resource and education business, a newly emerging actor, originally included human resource companies, including private business operators that provided services specially adapted to career and job hunting support for students, as well as services targeted at elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools and universities. Over the last 15-plus years, these private business operators have increasingly moved into university education, providing reference materials, teaching materials, and programs, dispatching lecturers for seminars, classes, and career education courses, administering various diagnostic tests, and offering consulting about how to provide career support and education at the university.

This article will examine the current state of career support and education at today’s universities, focusing on the involvement and impact of the human resource and education business, and discuss the nature of the problems this is causing in university education and the issues we are facing.

## II. The process of expansion of career support and education at universities

First of all, I would like to present an overview that covers when career support and career education became an entrenched part of university education, what kind of processes they have gone through, and how the current “landscape” described in Part I emerged.

In my personal opinion, the process leading from the establishment of career support and education at universities to their entrenchment and rapid expansion can be divided into three phases.

### 1. Phase 1: From job hunting support to career support (ca. 2000–)

Universities have traditionally been engaged in providing support for students’ job hunting, an activity that can be seen as a precursor of the career support and education of today. At the start of the first phase of the process in question, which is also the start of the path toward the current situation, there was a shift from job hunting support to “career support.”

One change of symbolic importance was the widespread renaming of universities’ existing “job placement” departments or bureaus, to something along the lines of “career center” (sometimes “career support center” or “career support office,” depending on the university, but below the term “career center” will be used), accompanied by reorganizations of these bodies. Sawada (Sawada 2011) lists the years of establishment (reorganization) of career centers at leading universities across Japan as shown in Table 1.

It is evident that major universities at the leading edge of this trend had made these changes by the early 2000s. It is also noteworthy that national universities such as Kyoto University, Hitotsubashi University and the University of Tokyo appear on this table. It is likely that afterward, while there may have been a time lag, a considerable number of universities nationwide followed in converting job placement departments to career centers.

What is important is that the shift from job placement department to career center was not just a matter of renaming, but was accompanied by an *expansion* of the contents of support the university provides to students. In short, conventional job hunting support carried out by traditional job placement departments was targeted at students just before or during the job hunting process, and consisted of offering information and guidance regarding job hunting and prospective employers, while passing along various pieces of job hunting know-how and giving individual counseling (Oshima 2012). While career centers took over these duties as is, but at the same time they targeted students in earlier years not yet near the job hunting stage, aiming to raise awareness regarding work, facilitate career design, explore what they hope to do, industries and occupations in which students might be interested, encourage self-analysis, and support searches for internships (for case studies, see Saito 2005).

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**Table 1. Years of establishment (reorganization) of career centers**

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1999	Ritsumeikan University
2000	Teikyo University
2001	Kyoto University
2002	Rikkyo University, Waseda University
2003	Chuo University
2004	Komazawa University, Meiji Gakuin University, Toyo University, Kansai University, Doshisha University, Hitotsubashi University
2005	Asia University, Hosei University, Senshu University, The University of Tokyo
2006	Meiji University, Kwansei Gakuin University, Shinshu University
2007	Kobe University, University of Yamanashi, Utsunomiya University

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*Source:* Sawada 2011.

As it happened, Phase 1 coincided with a period when university graduates were finding it increasingly difficult to secure employment. For this reason a significant number of universities must have recognized, if not stating outright, that unless they laid the “groundwork” for students to begin job hunting, not just in the first semester of the third year but starting in earlier years, by “raising awareness” and “cultivating” marketable skills, simply offering job hunting support from late in the third year onward would not suffice. However, at the same time, what gave theoretical validity to expansion of the contents of support was the perception that the primary role of a university was not to provide job hunting support in a narrow sense, but rather give students insight and foresight regard living and working that would stand them in good stead throughout their lives, and the discourse on “careers” and “career support” that rapidly gained prevalence in Japanese society at this time, which dealt with support intended to enable students to choose a future path based on long-range career design.

So, what were the substantive results of the conversion from job placement department to career center? One thing obvious to any observer is the significant expansion of the scope of work carried out at career centers. Does this mean that the career centers established (reorganized) at universities from this period onward were reinforced with abundant in-house human resources to carry out an expanded range of duties? It is not hard to imagine that the answer is no. As a result, work at career centers that could not be carried out by regular staff on their own was outsourced, and this is precisely when the human resource and education business came on the scene. Even before the above-described changes, at private universities with large numbers of students, even when if job placement departments handled job hunting support for students, they sometimes formed partnerships or outsourced work to private business operators in the human resources sector. In some cases, professionals in the human resource and education business changed jobs and went to work for the job placement departments of universities. The conversion of job placement departments to career centers and the expansion of job hunting support to broader career support strengthened these connections and encouraged these trends while boosting them in quantitative terms.

Looking back objectively, even during the period when job placement departments were strictly dedicated to offering job hunting support to students, changes in job hunting platforms and styles (primarily online recruitment, entry sheets, introduction of aptitude testing that gauges abilities and personality) meant that universities’ job hunting support for students was growing gradually more dependent on the human resource business. We can see that the new “career support” sector emerged in this context, and its dependence on outside business operators suddenly accelerated. Initially, universities’ job placement departments (career centers) did not necessarily have the track record or expertise to provide “career support” to students in lower

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grades prior to job hunting. It was the human resource and education business that sharply observed these developments, saw opportunities, and entered the world of university education.

## **2. Phase 2: From career support to career support and education (2006–)**

Phase 2 was a time when, in addition to further enhancing career support for students, including job hunting support, as seen in Phase 1, a series of major universities began offering not only extracurricular support through the career center but also “career education courses” as part of the regular curriculum (at universities that joined this trend later, once they were on board the emphasis was on “career education” rather than career support).

A major stimulus for this development was that MEXT around this time designated “promotion of career education” as a pillar of its Good Practice Project, a series of subsidy programs implemented with the intention of reforming university education. It began with the 2006 “Support Program for Contemporary Educational Needs” (Theme 5: “Promotion of Practical, Integrated Career Education”), which was followed by subsidy programs entitled “Support for University Programs Developing Employment Skills of University Students” (2010–) and “Educational Improvement and Enhancing the Organization Based on Needs of the Industry” (2012–) (at one point the Good Practice Project for “employment skills” was suspended under the then-ruling Democratic Party of Japan’s budget screening initiative).

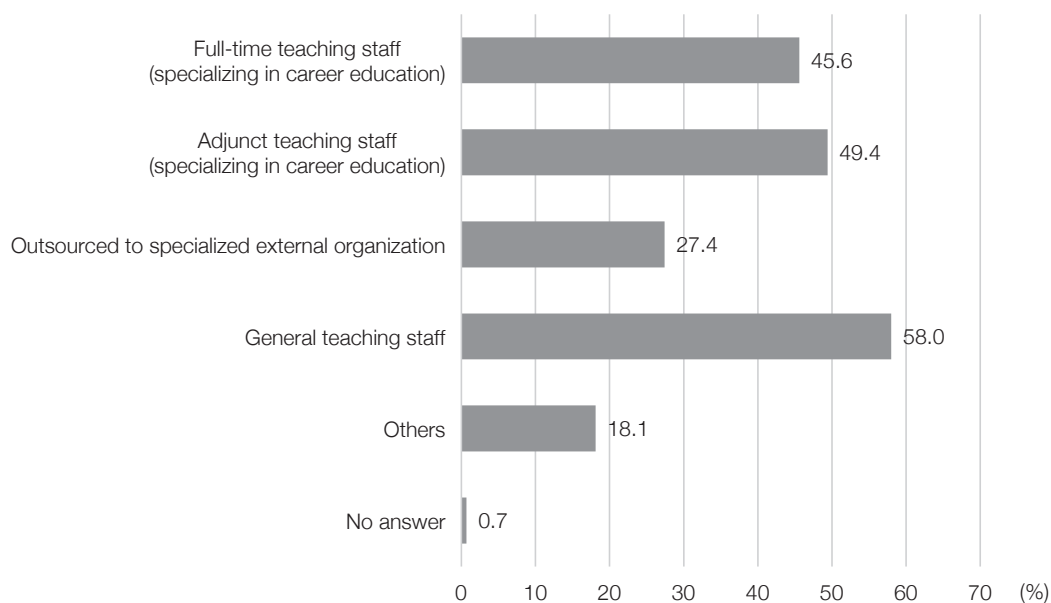
At the outset of this period the job shortage for university graduates was less severe than at the peak, but their situation was still severe compared to what it had been before the 1990s. A few years later, following the global financial crisis, the job market appeared to be growing sparse once more. Under these circumstances, universities that wanted to focus on offering job hunting support and career support to students could not avoid seeking out financial aid through the government’s higher education policies. The Good Practice Project not only provides funding for individual universities, particularly universities that receive subsidies, to further enhance support for students, but also appears to have facilitated consensus-building within universities towards building such support systems (Suzuki 2013).

As a result, forms of support that emerged during Phase 2 included enhancement and strengthening of support and counseling for students including career counseling, distribution and utilization of portfolios for career support, and internships and experience-based PBL (Problem-Based Learning) in conjunction with bodies outside the university, but what many universities focused on intensively was the establishment of career education courses (including internships and PBL for which academic credit was offered). Career education courses developed out of career support courses and seminars (that went beyond direct job hunting support) which career centers had begun offering in Phase 1, establishing them as part of the regular curriculum.

Why was it necessary to shift to a model where career education courses were part of the core curriculum? Simply put, students who really needed such support through extracurricular courses and seminars were in an overwhelming majority of cases unable to obtain it because they were not aware of their own needs. For this reason, many universities have made career education courses (at least some of them) mandatory.

So, who was responsible for teaching the career education courses that proliferated at universities from this period onward? It is hard to believe that the university education system was prepared to handle this. In some cases full-time faculty members with related areas of specialization, such as business administration, psychology, and education, may have been in charge of career education courses, but in many cases, it was the human resource and education business, which had been steadily growing stronger since Phase 1, that was responsible for the rapidly increasing number of career education courses.

During Phase 2, while human resource and education business operators offered consulting on lesson plans and teaching materials for universities’ career education courses, they also began dispatching personnel to teach career education courses, which contributed to a further rise in their numbers. And that is not all. Of these personnel, coming from private business operators many went on to start their own businesses, and



Source: “Survey of University Presidents on Employment Skills Education” (2010).

Figure 1. Who is charge of career education classes? (Multiple answers possible)

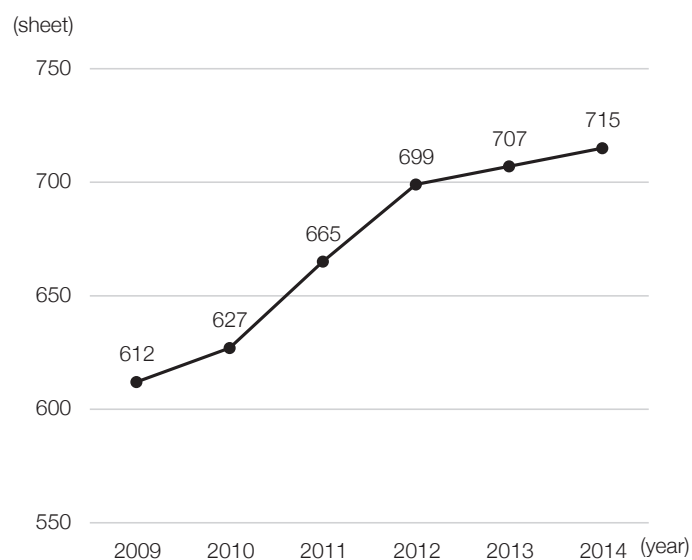
among those with experience as instructors dispatched by private business operators to teach career education courses, an increasing number went on to become adjunct instructors of such courses, unaffiliated with any business operator (Y. Watanabe 2017). In this way, the pool of “external human resources” in charge of universities’ career education course expanded, and from this pool, a new type of specially appointed teaching staff affiliated with career centers went on to become regular university staff members at many universities.

Figure 1 shows the results of the “Survey of University Presidents on Employment Skills Education” (2010) conducted by Recruit Shingaku Soken. In terms of who was in charge of career education courses, the three commonly selected responses as indicated from the top to the third were teaching staff can be classified as “external human resources.” The exact breakdown is not clear, but it suggests a significant dependence on this sector.

In the educational system up to high school, “external human resources” involved in career education does not indicate those in charge of classes, but literally to external actors that cooperate with career education at schools by acting as guest lecturers, coordinating partnerships between schools and companies and so forth (the “Research Survey Collaborators Meeting on the Practical Use of External Human Resources in Career Education” 2011). However, in university education, it is precisely these “external human resources” that teach career education classes as part of the regular curriculum.

### 3. Phase 3: From career support and education to universalization (2011–)

During Phase 2, change took place at faster-moving universities and gradually spread to other universities, and career support and education, including the establishment of career education courses, expanded quantitatively in the Japanese university education system. Then, during Phase 3, these trends became broadly universal throughout Japan, even at universities that had thus far been slow to act. The decisive factors were clearly MEXT’s amending the Standards for the Establishment of Universities (2010) and declaring the implementation of “career guidance” (which used to be called “vocational guidance”) mandatory. More precisely, under the amended Standards for the Establishment of Universities, universities were called on to “implement curricula and conduct work for students’ welfare and guidance” (Article 42-2) so as to enable



Source: MEXT, “Status on the Reform of the Contents of Education at Universities” (data for each academic year).

Figure 2. Number of universities offering career education as part of the curriculum

students “to cultivate the abilities necessary for being socially and professionally independent.” In fact, the implementation of career guidance (vocational guidance) is not synonymous with the establishment of career education, and many other approaches to the former could be taken. However, it is not hard to imagine that for universities that had been slow to act thus far, the establishment of career education courses like those already in place at other universities appeared to be the easiest course of action.

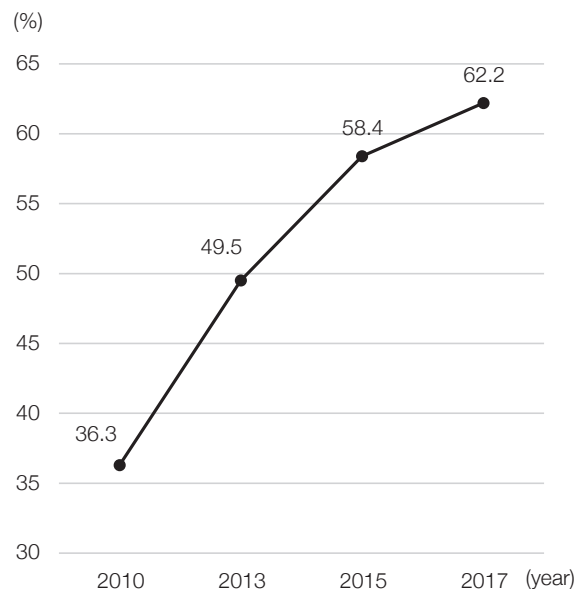
MEXT data for each academic year from the “Status on the Reform of the Contents of Education at Universities” show changes in the number of universities offering career education as part of the curriculum, as in Figure 2.

As of 2009, the figure already stood at a high percentage (85%) of all universities, but the amended Standards for the Establishment of Universities must certainly have had a great impact in the direction of eliminating the remaining universities not yet offering career education.

Meanwhile, “Survey on the Student Support Initiatives at Universities” conducted by the Japan Student Services Organization (JASSO) investigated the number of universities offering career education is required, and the percentages for only the years in which the survey was administered are shown in Figure 3.

These figures do not necessarily mean that career education courses are mandatory throughout the entire university, but includes universities where they are offered as a required course in a specific faculty/department (in 2017, such courses were conducted across the entire university in 40.1% of cases, implemented by faculty or department unit in 22.1% of cases). Furthermore, even if a career education course is established as a required course, most universities have curricula structured so that it is required only in the first year and as an elective course from the second year onward. However, even taking these points into account, it is clear that the spread of career education courses is remarkable, and they have become a thoroughly accepted part of university education in Japan.

Phase 3 is a period in which the amendment of the Standards for the Establishment of Universities required the Japanese university education system to offer career support and education and provided legal grounds for its legitimacy, resulting in its widespread adoption at universities throughout Japan. In terms of basic principles, it would not be surprising if there were debate over how universities, with a mandate “as the center of arts and sciences, to teach a wide range of knowledge, and to develop intellectual, moral



Source: JASSO, "Survey on the Student Support Initiatives at Universities."

Figure 3. Percentage of universities at which career education is required

and advanced abilities through educating and researching specialized arts and sciences deeply" (Article 83 of the School Education Act), should incorporate career support and education into their regular curricula. However, it would be safe to say there is no evidence of major debates occurring at the nation's universities. Both MEXT's higher education policies and the individual universities prioritize the *reality* and *actuality* of the university system over its *principles*, and universities that had become universalized could be said to have slipped into, as the path of least resistance, the practice of supporting students with the increasingly difficult process of "transitioning from education to employment" and moved forward incrementally.

Thus, seen from the human resource and education business side as well, Phase 3 was a period of further expansion (universalization) of the university's "career support and education" market. Certainly, during this time an increasing number of universities sought to offer support and education independently rather than relying on the human resource and education business, but in many cases a central role was played by "external human resources" coming from private business operators in the human resource and education sector, who were later incorporated into the university organization. In that sense, the relationship between business and university education has come to the point where it is not possible to grasp the relationship only in terms of outsourcing or dispatching of instructors.

Also, from the perspective of human resource and education business, it could be anticipated that market expansion would reach a ceiling if the business model was limited to providing services specially tailored to job hunting support and career education courses. Therefore, during this period, the participation of the human resource and education business in university education was greatly expanded in scope, including providing tools for effect measurement of career education and evaluation methods for measuring generic skills that students have acquired (Kawaijuku Educational Institution and RIASEC Inc. 2015; 2016), as well as offering internships, PBL, and global experience programs, all of which areas significantly overlap with those of the reformed university education system. While Phase 3 can be seen as a period of market *saturation*, it can also be seen as one of exploration of new markets.



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### III. The structure of expansion of career support and education

The characteristics of the process of expansion of career support and education in university education, over less than 20 years, as described in the preceding section, can be summarized as follows.

First, the content of support has expanded from “job hunting support” to broader “career support” and further to “career education” that provides career support as a part of an academic curriculum. As a matter of fact, job hunting support is still being carried out energetically, and as the Career Consulting Study Group (MEXT 2012) points out, while universities describe what they offer as “career education,” in practical terms there are many universities that provide what can best be categorized as “job hunting-centered” support through the curriculum.

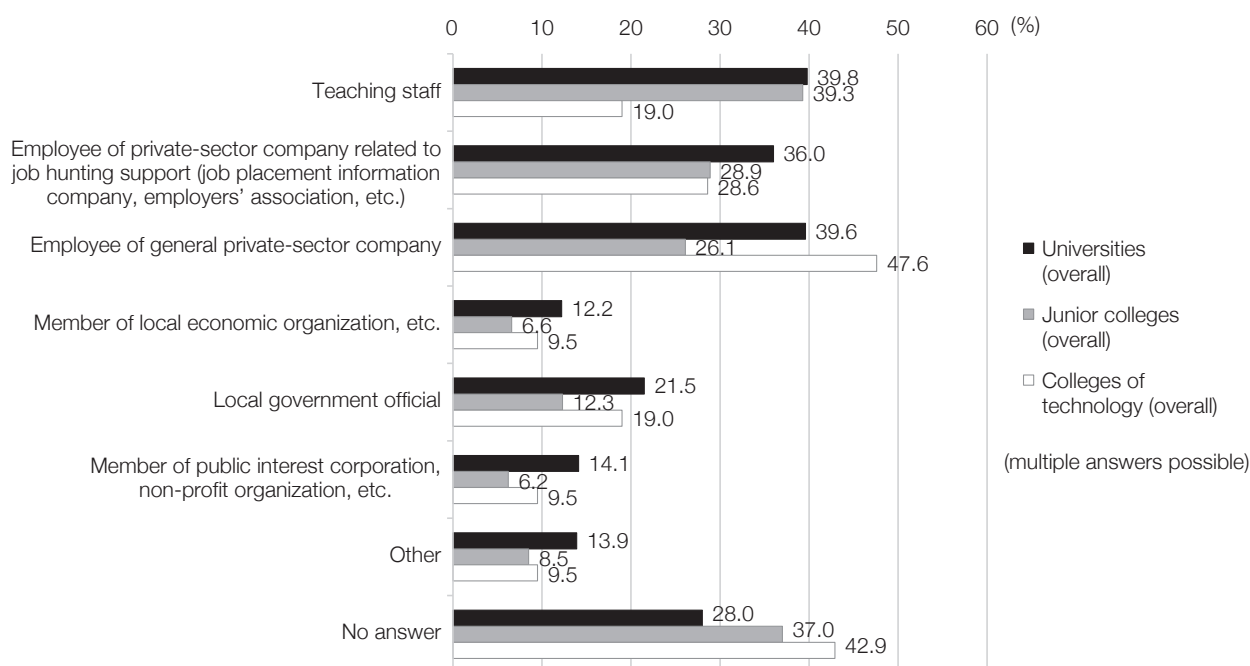
It may appear that universities offer such career support and education for the reason of job hunting support during the third year is not sufficient for students under current circumstances (i.e. realities of students), but conversely, at universities that are classified as “career education-oriented” there is also scope for job hunting support, and in the sense that it overlaps with the principles of general university education (liberal arts education), it can be said that career support and education is being implemented with a broad perspective at these universities. In that sense, it should be noted that the actual situation of the expansion from job hunting support to career support and career education is quite diverse, even though the sequence of the expansion process is common to all universities.

Second, support for students has expanded from focus on the third year of university to seamless support for students from the first through the fourth year. However, support for students in the fourth year of university is often in effect limited to counseling for students during the job hunting process, and in that sense, the latter half of the fourth year is a lull in support activities. As a matter of course, career centers continue to provide individualized support with regard to job interviews and so forth for students who have not yet secured employment, but the scope of this support is limited. In terms of debate, some argue that universities should actively provide work rule education and life planning education related to taxes, insurance, pensions, finances, social security and so on to students during the period right before entering the working world (Komikawa 2011), but few universities practically do so. This state of affairs symbolically represents the *reality* of career support and education at Japanese universities, of which job hunting support remains the mainstay.

Third, the format of support for students has expanded, from mainly consisting of extracurricular guidance, seminars and classes, and individual counseling, to support provided through the regular curriculum. In terms of support outside the regular curriculum, many programs are one-time-only, but with regard to career education courses as part of the regular curriculum, there are examples of generous and ongoing support with a minimum of 15 classes in a course.

However, most career education courses are not designed to deepen systematic learning based on career-related academics and theory, but rather are pragmatic in terms of content and structure, intended to encourage students’ awareness and understanding of career design. Some of these courses apply in each class what was once covered in extracurricular seminars and classes, as suggested by Figure 4 (JASSO 2017), which shows “persons partially in charge of career education courses.” Although there is generally a particular person responsible for the class, there are some examples of a different person coming to teach the class each time.

Finally, there has been a major shift from a system in which students’ career support and education was primarily the responsibility of staff at career centers, with some areas entrusted to private business operators from the human resources sector, to one increasingly dependent mainly on “external human resources” such as adjunct instructors and specially appointed teaching staff, while some internal teaching staff remain involved. While today this has become a familiar “landscape” of education, it cannot be overlooked that reliance on the business sector to handle these areas ultimately has a major effect not only on the *content* but also on the *quality* of universities’ career support and education.



Source: JASSO (2017).

Figure 4. Persons partially in charge of career education courses (2017 academic year)

As we have seen, in the final analysis, the structural characteristics of the process of expansion of career support and education at universities are such that it could not take place without “partnership with,” i.e. dependence on, the human resource and education business. Underlying this state of affairs is a persistent job shortage for university graduates that became apparent to all in the late 1990s, and resulted from the prolonged recession from the 1990s onward and the downsizing and restructuring of the Japanese-style employment practices. It was precisely the same period when “second-generation baby boomers” (the children of postwar baby boomers) were reaching the end of their university years, the 18-year-old population was beginning to decline, and a struggle for survival among universities was heating up. Naturally, universities had no choice but to focus on offering job-hunting support, but it was just then, right before the year 2000, that the platform for job hunting changed. As a result, universities’ measures to strengthen job hunting support increasingly could not be implemented without the *support*, in turn, of the human resource business that was leading the platform change. This was the starting point for all the changes we have been seeing.

Since then, universities’ superficial stance, that it was against their principles to simply keep beefing up job hunting support, formed an illicit union with their actual intentions regarding insufficient job hunting support measures from the third year onward, which were shaped by their acceptance of large numbers of first-generation university students (i.e. whose parents and forebears had not attended university) (Kaneko 2013) who would not previously have been considered eligible for higher education as a result of simultaneous declining birthrate and ever-growing capacity of universities. As a consequence, “job hunting support” developed and expanded first to “career support” and then further to “career education. Needless to say, this was given great impetus by MEXT’s “carrot” (subsidies) and “stick” (amendment of the Standards for the Establishment of Universities) policies of higher education.

In this way, the expanded field of career support and education at universities presented an ideal business opportunity (or market) for the human resource and education sector. And these business operators succeeded not only in expanding support, but also in integrating themselves into university education, including regular

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curriculum, while skillfully utilizing the “bases” they had embedded within universities during the job hunting support phase. Obviously, a decisive factor in this process was that universities lacked the abilities and resources, in terms of both expertise and human resources related to career support and education, to push back against this process.

#### **IV. Critical challenges facing university education**

So, how should we evaluate the current state of career support and education at universities, as described above? No doubt there are certain widespread and prevalent views of it. By extension, it is also possible to adopt a boldly different angle and present a new perspective in specific terms.

##### **1. The “erosion” of university education by the business sector**

One view of the current situation is that it represents “erosion” of university education by the business sector, and that university education as it was originally intended is being “distorted.” In fact, the expansion of career support and education, or the transformation of university education itself which led to this expansion, has certainly caused a number of worrisome problems affecting present-day university education.

To cite some of the main ones: first, the situation naturally differs depending on the university, but the establishment of a large number of career education courses is placing a strain on other parts of the curriculum, and it is possible that the ever-growing volume of extracurricular job hunting support and career support is squeezing out other aspects of student life. Students’ time and energy are not infinite, and the more they focus on their future careers and job hunting, the less time and energy they will be able to devote to the specialized education and liberal arts education that are supposed to be their main academic activities, as well as their to own independent study and activities. This situation is not limited to the latter half of the third year, when job hunting looms on the horizon, but it has crept into the first and second years, and is beginning earlier and lasting longer. The earlier start and longer duration of the job hunt, which has widely been pointed out, is caused not only by relationships with companies that recruit new graduates, but also by the state of university education.

Second, while extracurricular job hunting support and career support, detached from the regular university curriculum, would appear to be an unavoidable necessity, under current circumstances career education courses are part of the regular curriculum (mostly positioned within the framework of general education courses or required courses for all students), but are not linked to specialized education and liberal arts education, meaning they are “external attachments” to the undergraduate program. In other words, the ambiguous group of career education courses, which are not clearly positioned within the Diploma Policy, Curriculum Policy, Curriculum Map and Curriculum Tree (all currently popular frameworks for the reform of undergraduate university education), are in fact quite dominant and occupy a significant portion of the curriculum.

Third, the ongoing growth of career support and education is in fact propelled by current university education’s increasing inclination toward “Enhancement of Employability.” For instance, the dispute arose from a notice issued by MEXT itself, which calls for “the reorganization or the abolishment of the humanities and social sciences at national universities” (MEXT 2015) and the highly impactful proposal of reorganization of national universities by dividing into two groups consists of G and L types” (Toyama 2014) (G and L standing for “global” and “local”), the implications of which were that with the exception of a few top-level research-oriented universities, the majority of universities should double down even more strongly than before on education that responds to “the needs of society.” However, what is meant by “society” is not the civil society within which diverse people coexist, but rather economic and corporate society. This leads to the idea that universities should focus on career education, which raises students’ awareness of job hunting and employment skills, and teach practical or pragmatic knowledge and skills that will be useful immediately

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after they make their debut in “society.”

If the fundamental purpose of university education is the formation not only of good professionals (i.e. career education) but also of good citizens (i.e. citizenship education) (Kameyama 2009), the current trend is clearly one of bias toward one of these two areas. In short, in today’s university education, there is extremely faint awareness of the importance of citizenship education (H. Watanabe 2019). Moreover, even as universities lean in to and pour resources into career education, this education lacks breadth and depth in the sense of fostering members of “professional society,” and the focus is on training members of “corporate society” for maximum employability. Furthermore, training for employability is also generally based on addressing individual factors, as symbolized by the dominant paradigm of cultivating “[fill-in-the-blank]-ability,” and it is highly likely that this paradigm is far removed from the world of intelligence and cultivation connected with the fully integrated knowledge and well-rounded character that university education was originally intended to produce (Komikawa 2010).

Finally, it must be noted that the above-mentioned changes in university education and the inclination toward “enhancement of employability” are certainly affecting students. This does not need to be discussed in detail here, so I will only present conclusions.

There are certainly differences among individuals in terms of how deeply students get involved in the career support and education offered by universities, and in their own search for employment. However, they fully absorb the message from today’s university education landscape, where they are surrounded by various forms of support, and by going through the actual job hunting process after experiencing the preparatory stages of career support and education, they are succeeding marvelously in achieving “anticipatory socialization” for members of corporate society (Komikawa 2012 and 2019). While this socialization overlaps with the process of “independent transition to professional society”, it lacks the latter’s broadening of social perspective and is confined to narrower “corporate society,” and fosters an ethos in which the burden of responsibility is on the individual. How university education takes responsibility for this state if affairs emerges as a highly serious issue.

## **2. Toward redefinition of university education**

As described above, the current state of university education, which has expanded not only job hunting support but also career support and education under the influence of the human resource and education business, is certainly a distorted one, and efforts to improve it are required. Clearly this much may be acknowledged. However, does this mean that what we want for the future of university education is total avoidance of job hunting support, career support and career education, and for the human resource and education business to withdraw completely from the field? Asking this question literally underscores anew how difficult it would be to resist the current state of university education. Perhaps, however, this can lead us to another way of looking at the current status of career support and education.

Present-day universities, which have reached a “universal phase” and are accepting a large number of first-generation students, are in need of a radical redefinition and reform of university education. Even prior to the idea of “border-free universities” where the enrollment limit exceeds the number of applicants (Miyake et al. 2014), this has been pointed out for a long time on many occasions including the necessity of “differentiation of university by mission” presented by Central Council for Education (CCE) in 2005.

Why is “redefinition” necessary? In short, if we were to adhere to the current definition of university education, it would only be effective at a handful of top-level universities. The need for “reform” comes from the fact that except for at this handful of top-level universities, it has been necessary to expand the function (role) of university education. Specifically, this role is to ensure that students acquire basic academic ability and basic knowledge at the general education level, to strengthen their motivation toward university academics and specialized education, and to develop a career-oriented mentality and basic or general employment abilities for their future after graduation. These may not be part of the traditional definition of a university

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that engages in *academics-centered* research and education, but it is essential in order for universities in the universal phase to fulfill the role (mission) expected by society. Naturally, “society” in this case does not mean only economic and corporate society in a narrow sense.

So, over the last 15 years, have Japanese universities succeeded in redefining and reforming university education in that sense? The various efforts and initiatives carried out at the level of individual universities or in specific fields, such as First-Year Experience, cannot be overlooked, but when viewed as a whole, the pace of change has been quite glacial. In that context, the area of career support and education can be seen as a truly exceptional one in which reforms proceeded at a rapid pace. In reality, this was propelled by the “invasion” of the human resource and education business, and the true face of “reform” is highly distorted and problematic, as described above.

Career support and education at universities today certainly fulfills one of the roles into which redefined university education is expected to expand, and has the characteristic of linking extracurricular education with the regular curriculum, which has the effect of encouraging students’ independent learning and activities. Certainly, under current circumstances there is an excessive emphasis on job hunting support, and this has a harmful effect in that it is closer to the rationales of business than to those of university education.

Also, while redefinition of university education inevitably requires “differentiation of universities by mission,” in fact this requires a combination of research and education staff and of full-time and part-time staff. In the context of career support and education, a new type of university teaching staff that do not necessarily have academic backgrounds has appeared due to the internalization of personnel from human resource and education business. Along with “external human resources” such as adjunct instructors and so forth, they are play an expanded role in university education. Expansion of the function of university education cannot be carried out exclusively by on-campus staff to begin with, it is obviously necessary to collaborate with external actors, and there is already a significant track record of doing so. Actually, the construction of such frameworks has been propelled by immediate need and influenced by subsidy programs under the nation’s higher education policies, rather than being independently carried out by universities based on a clear vision, and has been characterized by patchwork solutions.

One could say that when you have seen one case of how this develops, you have seen them all, and there is no need for further discussion. The current state of career support and education at universities is certainly severely imbalanced by the influence of the human resource and education business. However, if it is possible to address the already evident problems one by one and improve career support and education so as to achieve legitimate “university education”, it may be possible to see a “new form of university education” in the universal phase, and this is another perspective.

I am keenly aware that this is neither easy nor simple, but the point is that it depends on universities taking the initiative. As Shirai (Shirai 2017) has noted, even in the field of job hunting support and career support, it is not impossible for universities to exert control over the business sector. The refinement of these relationships in a more comprehensive set of dimensions, encompassing the overall design of career support and education as part of university education, and its practical and effective implementation, should not be a logical impossibility.

If this is the case, we must acknowledge that simply bemoaning universities’ blatant lack of initiative, and the “erosion” of university education through utter reliance on the business sector for career support and education, could be called the mere howling of the losing team. Bemoaning the situation alone cannot solve the current problems. Perhaps, having fully grasped the seemingly insurmountable challenges we face, and remaining cognizant of the situation, it is time for us to adopt a positive stance and take positive actions toward shaping the future.

This paper is based on an article commissioned by the editorial committee of *The Japanese Journal of Labour Studies* for inclusion in the special feature “Job-Hunting as an Industry” in its February-March 2020 issue (vol.62, no.716) with additions and amendments in line with the gist of *Japan Labor Issues*.

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